Final Report
of
SC Task Force on Testing

Approved by

SC Education Oversight Committee
SC Department of Education

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Report of the Testing Task Force
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Assessment for Learning

South Carolina has the opportunity to lead the nation in testing that goes to the heart of *No Child Left Behind*: ensuring that all students learn state standards and grow academically from year to year. As the success of every child has become imperative, the role of testing has changed from assessment **of** learning to assessment **for** learning. The recommendations in this document are intended to guide revisions to testing programs so that South Carolina's investment in assessment reaps ever increasing dividends in improved student achievement. This return on investment will be maximized only when the investment is made in tools that provide relevant, easily accessible information to students, parents, educators and policy makers.

High levels of student achievement and reliable and valid assessment are attained through the careful alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and are affected by the quality of each. The legislative provisos requiring review of South Carolina's state assessments have wisely provided an impetus for improvement of the assessment portion of this important equation for student success. Indeed, if South Carolina is to embrace its responsibilities for ensuring that our students reach the standards and aspirations of our own *Education Accountability Act* (EAA) and federal *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation, it is critical that improvement of assessment be part of the plan.

Assessment in South Carolina must serve two purposes: to assist learning and to provide federal and state accountability. Currently the assessment system meets the accountability requirements far better than the learning requirements. While at times these needs appear to compete, a balance can and must be established.

Introduction

Operating in keeping with Provisos 1.32 and 1.80 of 2004, a task force was convened in the fall of 2004 by the Education Oversight Committee and the South Carolina Department of Education to make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding changes in the statewide testing system to provide information and reports for improving academic performance. The Task Force consisted of 35 members from across the state and represented more than 25 school districts and thousands of educators, children, and citizens.

The time has come to retire the term "Accountability Testing" or the intent to practice "Accountability Testing" in South Carolina. Accountability is a legitimate and important purpose for a state assessment, but our students, parents, educators and citizens deserve **"Accountability Plus."** If a test provides only an evaluation measure, it is a very expensive and time consuming method for providing only one piece of the puzzle. Many more pieces of the puzzle are

required if the goal is to provide a clear picture of student achievement that can inform instruction in an effort to improve learning.

Stewardship of our children's learning and taxpayers' dollars demands a careful reconsideration by policy makers regarding what needs to be included in South Carolina's commitment to excellence in assessment. Thus, the Task Force is proposing for consideration a systematic set of recommendations. We believe that these recommendations define the "Plus" in "Accountability Plus" that will lead to improved teaching and learning.

State policy-makers, state and district education agencies, and school and classroom educators share responsibility for student assessments. Assessment for learning must include quality classroom assessments for diagnosis and student accountability, on-going formative assessments to monitor student progress and guide instruction, and measures of achievement growth, as well as summative assessments for student and system accountability. The State can, and should, contribute to quality assessment in each of the areas through professional development focused on improving daily classroom assessments, formative assessment tools to guide instruction, and end-of-year tests that provide useful information to all stakeholders in the education process. Local schools and districts, too, must increase efforts to improve assessment practices.

The Task Force's deliberations and recommendations take into account short-term and long-term changes in state assessments in general and for particular testing programs. Thus, the report is organized first around general recommendations and then short and long-term recommendations about particular programs. While the Task Force recognizes that procurement policies and contracts often make immediate changes impossible, making the short term changes as expeditiously as possible is a key to improving achievement as quickly as possible.

General Recommendations

1. **Since the alignment of standards, instruction and assessment is critical to improving achievement, the Task Force endorses the continued use of state-developed or state-adapted standards-based tests.** State ownership or control of tests allows them to be monitored and modified as necessary to ensure instructional and technical quality and reflect a solid match to the South Carolina Standards. In a high-stakes accountability context, a test designed specifically to measure achievement of the state's standards is the most appropriate choice and is of paramount importance. Off-the shelf tests are unlikely to align to state standards and provide little opportunity for close, on-going scrutiny or modification. If the state chooses to adopt and adapt a test or item pool, independent verification of the match of items to the standards should be required.

2. **The state should provide a formative assessment system that allows educators to monitor student progress during the school year.** This system should provide diagnostic information in a timely manner to all school districts for each student. Just as businesses need measures of leading and lagging indicators to assure quality, schools need timely, reliable, and valid

measures of student performance periodically during the school year to plan instruction at the beginning of the year and adjust it during the year. A testing program that provides only an end-of-year assessment is insufficient. Sometimes referred to as benchmark tests, measures of progress that are closely aligned to the end-of-year assessment and that correlate highly with it will enhance instruction and help parents, educators, and students work toward improvement.

Formative assessments may be used to analyze general strengths and weaknesses in instruction, to consider placement and planning for the next grade level, to plan instruction based on data, and to understand the performance of students individually and across achievement categories. Data from these assessments should reside at the school and district level (not state) because this is where they will be used. However, because the match to the end-of-year assessment is so critical, financial and technical state-level support for this assessment is vital to its development or procurement. Many school districts do not have the resources to evaluate and purchase these assessments and for those that do, it is less cost effective for each district to develop or procure the assessments individually.

3. **The future of assessment is computerized. The state should position itself to administer and score all assessments electronically.** Computerized assessments will allow rapid reporting and in many cases may provide more elaborated electronic reporting than would be possible given the costs and volume of paper reports. To make computerized testing possible, some investment in the technology infrastructure of schools will be needed though many schools already have computer labs that could be used for this purpose. An added benefit of this approach is that the dollars invested in technology will enhance instruction as well as assessment since the technology can be used throughout the year for teaching and learning.

   Computer adaptive testing is on the horizon for state assessments. This methodology allows individual students to be tested with a set of items matched to their achievement level. The test adjusts itself, by selecting appropriate items from a large item pool, to the achievement level of the student taking the test. While this methodology is not currently acceptable for federal accountability, it offers, when done properly, a more accurate measure of student achievement in a shorter period of time. The methodology and technology for a new approach to testing are here. South Carolina should position itself for the future, and plans for future assessments should consider computer adaptive testing.

4. **More information about the state standards and assessments must be developed and released.** Although information is available on the state website and through workshops, additional information is needed about standards, test items, and test forms.

Standards

Stakeholders need additional clarifying information about the standards. Electronic resources, in addition to more traditional materials, should be developed so that students, educators, and parents can easily access clarifying information about the essential nature of the standards. Imagine going to a web site, clicking on a standard, and being able to get detailed information about the skills the standard addresses, information about the cognitive complexity of the standard, examples of student performances that might be expected, and even some test questions that exemplify the standard. Educators admit to struggling with interpreting standards. They wonder what the standards mean when they are translated into a variety of expected student performances and instructional practices. If many educators struggle with interpretation, then parents and students must have an even more difficult task in understanding what learning is expected. By clarifying the standards, expectations will become more definite, and performance will be enhanced.

Additional review should also be undertaken to determine if the standards can undergo further prioritization. This will allow greater efficiency in assessment and ensure that the most important content receives adequate classroom focus.

Test Items

Large numbers of test items, along with technical information about their difficulty, should be released so that the link between the standards and expected student performance is clarified. It should also be noted that over time, as formative assessments are developed or procured by the state, the need for a large number of released items will be diminished.

Released Forms

While security is essential in a high-stakes environment, secrecy about the tests mitigates against proper use of information to improve student achievement and may breed skepticism among educators and the public about the assessments and their results. In addition to sample items, students, educators, and the public should have access to released forms of complete tests. Test forms do not need to be released annually, but their periodic release will provide educators and the public with the broad view of state expectations for student achievement at each grade level and subject.

5. **The state should have an expanded role in improving classroom assessment.** Frequent monitoring of student progress is a well-documented correlate of high achievement. Quality classroom assessments need to become a priority. Though these frequent measures of student progress are primarily the responsibility of the classroom teacher, the state has an expanded role to play in supporting this important endeavor.

   First, the state should provide assistance in the development of an item pool that will be made available to educators for classroom assessments. By coordinating efforts and providing technical assistance, the state should organize item writing or review, develop and approve item banks for formative purposes, provide a software platform for delivering the items to educators

electronically, and provide technical assistance in developing a review process that ensures the quality of the items and the match to standards. This resource will be invaluable to educators and will save countless work hours that educators spend developing their own test items.

Professional development to improve classroom assessment also needs state support. Educators graduate from teacher education programs with varying degrees of training in assessment. The State Department of Education should expand opportunities for educators to be trained in how to plan and develop content and technically appropriate classroom assessments. These assessments will provide information to guide instruction, and the rigor and quality of the assessments will communicate to parents and students the high expectations that are embodied in the state standards.

6. **After each annual assessment, a team of curriculum experts should meet with Office of Assessment staff and thoroughly analyze the results of the tests, including performance item by item.** From this analysis, a plan for disseminating additional information about the assessment results and instruction should be developed. These in-depth analyses might, for example, uncover specific aspects of the standards that appear to be poorly tested, taught or misunderstood by educators, aspects of the curriculum that are not being learned even by our most able learners, areas that are not covered by adopted texts, or combinations of cognitive levels and content that need more emphasis in the curriculum. Professional development and allocation of other resources should be informed by the findings.

   Additionally, test items should be released as needed in the context of targeting certain areas for improvement. For example, if in a particular year scores in the area of probability and statistics are low, releasing items from this area, along with instructional strategies, could become part of the improvement strategy.

In summary, student achievement is supported by layers of student assessment: frequent monitoring of student progress, diagnostic assessments, periodic formative assessments in classrooms, and end-of-year state assessments. The state of South Carolina and local school districts share responsibility for ensuring that students and our constituents reap the benefits of these assessments. We urge the state to invest in excellence in each of these levels of assessment, as each is integral to ensuring that all students grow academically and learn state standards. South Carolina has made a large investment in accountability testing; by instituting our recommendations the return on that investment will be even greater. We also assert that to be ready for the future, South Carolina must embrace computerized testing and position itself for computer adaptive testing.

Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT)

PACT is administered in grades 3-8 and includes English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies tests. Students receive a scale score and a categorical score—Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced—based on cut scores that were established by the State Board of Education. Although the standards for each grade level are organized according to strands, students do not receive strand-level scores on PACT, nor is strand-level information available at the school or district level. The current length of PACT and its underlying strand and standards structure make it difficult to obtain reliable information at the strand level for individual students and even for small groups of students. This has led to dissatisfaction with the test and frustration on the part of educators who are committed to improving achievement but are not provided information from this significant test to assist them.

It is important, as efforts are made to increase information for educators, students, and parents that the information remain reliable and valid. Strand scores could probably be made available for the next test administration, but research on the strands shows that current unreliability at the strand level would make such reports more misleading than informative. Thus, the Task Force has sought both long and short-term solutions to provide more information about student performance on PACT. The reports must provide more substantive information to guide instruction and the scores they reflect must be reliable. To accomplish this, the state must undertake a course of actions that change and improve over time, including refinement of the standards and standard structure for PACT.

Short-Term Recommendations for PACT

The timelines for implementing changes in a testing program are difficult to maneuver. Work on a particular year's tests starts well in advance of a test administration since forms must be developed, reviewed and printed, work coordinated with a contractor, delivery of test materials planned and completed, scoring arranged, and more. Thus, few changes can be made immediately or even very short term. However, stakeholders need more information now, and some solutions can be implemented in the short term.

1. **The Department of Education should continue its efforts to create clearly written and understandable descriptions of achievement levels that describe specific aspects of what students at particular achievement levels can and cannot do.** A sample of such a description is shown in Appendix A. These descriptions should become part of the PACT reporting package and made available on line. The descriptions should be written to help educators, students, and parents understand the meaning and implications of scores. The Department of Education has already completed the descriptions in English language arts and mathematics. Completing the science and social studies descriptions in time for reporting in all subject areas for the spring 2005 assessment must be a priority. The descriptions for the Advanced level need to be elaborated, and sample items should be added to these descriptions. A review process to allow parents and students to provide feedback related to clarity and usefulness of the descriptions should be implemented before final versions are available.

2. **A schedule for releasing items and test forms should be developed and implemented.** While the size of the item pool may place constraints on extensive releases, some releases of items and forms should be initiated in the very short term.

3. **An interim approach to strand-level reporting needs to be developed and implemented.** The best approach to providing this information would require going back to the standards and strands themselves and intentionally building them to support strand-level measurement; but this is a lengthy process and a shorter term solution is needed. To accomplish an interim solution, the State Department of Education should add multiple-choice items to strands, and possibly combine strands as appropriate, to achieve reliable results, starting with particular subjects or grade levels if it is necessary to phase the project in over time. It is desirable to have strand information at the student, class, and grade level, but if student level data cannot be obtained within PACT's constraints, then classroom, school, and district level data should still be reported.

Long-Term Recommendations for PACT

Longer term revisions to PACT are dependent on revisions to the standards and strands that the tests reflect. The recommendations of the Task Force therefore address the standards in addition to testing and reporting recommendations.

Standards

1. **The standards and strands should be revisited, revisions made based on a process of prioritization, and an organizational system for them developed and implemented that will support more reliable strand-level reporting for individual students and groups of students.** Such revisions will likely result in fewer standards and in some cases, fewer strands. However, the result will be a greater concentration on the most important content for lifelong success.
2. **Key standards that reflect the most important outcomes should be identified for each grade and subject.** Test development should then support more detailed reporting relative to these standards.
3. **Standards should be translated into item specifications that guide item development. Item specifications should allow each item to be described and tagged in terms of a primary standard, cognitive process, and knowledge or content dimension.** By associating this level of detailed information with item development and description, it will be possible to develop detailed reports about what students can and cannot do and will also result in a more aligned and valid assessment.

Testing

1. **The amount of testing is excessive and needs to be reduced.** The number of minutes per day of testing and number of days of testing is taxing, particularly at the elementary level. It is likely that performance on the last days of testing is affected by lack of student motivation or even

fatigue. Moreover by testing all students in all subjects at all grades, the number of tests makes it difficult to test any subject in depth.

Testing should be reduced by developing a sampling design for science and social studies. In such a design every student would take either social studies or science each year, but not both, except in grades where census testing is required in science to meet NCLB requirements. Prioritizing among standards, as described above, could also reduce testing time.

To reduce testing overload and scoring turnaround time, the task force recommends that the extended response section of the English language arts test be administered sufficiently early in the spring to allow scores to be combined with the multiple-choice scores as soon as multiple-choice scoring is completed.

To reduce testing time further, the Task Force recommends that field test items be included in each subject area test so that separate field tests would not be required.

2. **A differentiated assessment plan should be developed that will provide better information on certain subjects at particular grades.** Most importantly, Grade 3 PACT should be re-envisioned as primarily a reading test. Reading is the most important outcome of the primary grades and is critical to success in all of the other subjects. Thus, the third grade test should provide thorough assessment and reporting in the area of reading. In addition, assessment of mathematics, social studies, and science should be included as a part of the overall assessment with appropriate considerations being given to length and time of tests.

   By differentiating assessments at key grade levels, more items can be devoted to particular content, and by having more items, it is possible to accurately report more detailed information about student performance. As curriculum and instruction experts study priorities at other grade levels, it is possible that other grades will also be differentiated. For example, fifth grade PACT, serving as a terminal assessment of elementary school and a transition to middle school, might need a strong focus on English Language Arts and Mathematics, where the courses are sequential, as opposed to science and social studies where the content is more discrete from grade to grade. This approach does not lessen accountability; rather it focuses time and resources on those grades and content areas where particular accountabilities are most important.

3. **The reading and mathematics tests should be vertically equated to allow for meaningful measures of growth.** Examining both students' status on assessments and their improvement is consistent with the EAA's intent to report both absolute and improvement ratings. This will require a vertically aligned curriculum, an assessment that reflects an underlying latent trait, and a vertically equated item pool. The intent to develop such an item pool should be considered as the standards are revised. Also, where there is such equating, computer adaptive testing would become

possible as the size of the item pool expands. This should be a goal for the reading and mathematics tests in particular.

4. **The Task Force recommends that actions be taken so that Algebra I and English I scores be equated to grade level PACT so that middle school students are not required to take both tests.** Currently students enrolled in English I and Algebra I are required to take the end-of-course tests for each course and the grade level PACT.

5. **The construction of the test at cut scores needs to be improved and the cut scores should be changed to reflect changes in the test.** PACT was built to differentiate most accurately between the scores of Below Basic and Basic, since Basic was the minimum goal for all students at the time of test development. Since then, the accuracy of scores at the Proficient and Advanced levels is becoming increasingly important. Currently, the Advanced level of the test needs the most attention, particularly in English Language Arts.

   Finally, it should be recognized that as standards and assessments are significantly revised, new standard setting will eventually need to occur. Substantial changes in the content standards, the testing program and new uses of the data necessitate new standard setting.

Reporting

Newly revamped PACT assessments and revised standards will allow reporting that is not currently possible. The following additional reports are recommended.

1. Strand level reports for individual students, classes, and grade levels.
2. Right response summaries for students, classes, and grade levels that provide a useful item descriptor and the item data, including comparisons to school, district, or state data as appropriate.
3. "Maps" of tests, which are visual representations of the test's items and their difficulty, should be developed and disseminated to educators. Using such maps requires training. An example of a test map is included in Appendix B.

High School Testing

HSAP

The High School Assessment Program (HSAP) provides reports at the strand level. Information for improving performance related to these assessments will be enhanced by the formative assessment system, item pools, and professional development that were described in the general recommendations.

Because HSAP serves as the exit examination for high school, it is particularly important that items and test forms be released so that students, educators, and parents are fully aware of the expectations of the test. As students prepare for the

test, it would be useful for practice tests to be available for students to take and have scored on line. Such practice tests would need to include cautions that performance on the practice might not be the same as on the live test; however, the practice tests would at least give students a general idea of whether they are prepared to pass the examinations.

After considering whether students should be able to exempt HSAP, or at least the Exit Examination requirement, based on previous academic history such as passing all of the end-of-course examinations, excellent grades, or very high scores on PSAT, PLAN, SAT, ACT, the Task Force concluded that all students should take HSAP when first eligible. However, it recommends that a task force be convened to develop recommendations for alternative evidence and procedures that will allow students to meet graduation requirements even if they have failed HSAP. The need for these exemptions should be very few, but in rare instances where there is compelling evidence that a student is well-qualified for graduation, but perhaps health, recent enrollment in the school, or other conditions have allowed the student to take the test but prevented him or her from passing it, carefully considered alternatives for graduation should exist.

Concern was also expressed about the requirement for special needs students to continue to take HSAP after the first attempt. Since special needs students may remain in school until they are 21 years of age, repeatedly taking HSAP may be detrimental for some students with disabilities. Many special needs students will benefit from multiple opportunities to take HSAP. However, other students may benefit more from the discretionary administration of HSAP determined by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team. Accommodation policies and alternative assessments for students with disabilities need further research.

End-of-Course Examination Program

The Task Force recommends the continuation of EOCEP as an examination requirement in English language arts and mathematics, but that the requirement for an exit examination in science and social studies be replaced by the requirement that students must pass courses in Physical Science and U.S. History and Constitution for which there are end-of-course examinations. Like HSAP, the End-of-Course Examination Program will benefit from the general recommendations for testing that are included in this report.

STAR

STAR is a performance assessment that provides one of many assessment options that may qualify a student for gifted and talented services. The assessment was instituted in an agreement with the Office of Civil Rights for the purpose of increasing minority participation in the gifted and talented program, which has historically had under representation particularly from African American students. **The Task Force agrees with the intent of the assessment and recommends additional study of the extent to which STAR is actually accomplishing its intent**. If STAR is not meeting its purpose, it should be discontinued and a better alternative developed or adopted.

South Carolina Readiness Assessment

Young children learn (and express their learning) in ways and at rates far different from those of older students. Formal testing of young children is, therefore, widely considered an inappropriate practice**.** Systematic, curriculum-embedded performance assessments, like the Work Sampling System (WSS), hold special promise in their ability to accurately depict the abilities and achievements of young children. These measures, which rely upon the teacher's ongoing efforts to document student progress, are valid and reliable ***when implemented appropriately by well-trained educators****.*

The South Carolina Readiness Assessment (SCRA) is a standards-based adaptation of the Work Sampling System, designed for use throughout the kindergarten and first grade years. **The Task Force thus endorses - *in concept* - the SCRA as an appropriate means through which to assess the school readiness of South Carolina's children. Steps must be taken, however, to ensure its objective and appropriate use within the state's early childhood classrooms.**

The Task Force also has identified reading as a priority assessment area for primary grade students. An excellent reading assessment is extremely important for ensuring that first grade students, in particular, learn to read. Because SCRA does not provide adequate information to guide reading instruction, many school districts have layered a reading assessment on top of the SCRA. While this is workable, it is burdensome for educators. **A revision in kindergarten and first grade assessments to provide far greater focus on reading is recommended.** Research clearly demonstrates the importance of early acquisition of literacy skills, so an early focus on reading, through both instruction and assessment, should lead to improved reading achievement at a critical time in students' academic development.

Short Term Recommendations

1. Continue the Department's efforts to reinforce the SCRA's appropriate implementation. During the early months of 2004-2005, the Department has taken a number of steps to reinvigorate the SCRA training system - providing updated staff development materials and training to the state's early childhood and testing coordinators, taping an overview for ITV distribution, and establishing an SCRA consultant within the Office of Early Childhood. Additional efforts should focus on renewed and ongoing *teacher training* to ensure the instrument's valid and reliable use.

2. Differentiate clearly between the Readiness Assessment's ongoing documentation systems and the SCRAPI website. In recent years, the Department's training efforts have focused almost exclusively upon the SCRA's online ratings system (SCRAPI) as opposed to the need for ongoing, classroom documentation of student progress. The Department should either explore methods through which the SCRAPI site might be used to leverage educators' understandings of the Readiness Assessment's appropriate, formative implementation or clearly identify the site as its summative device.

3. Develop a *minimum* statewide data collection plan. At present, the state has established no set requirement for the amount or types of evidence to be collected. A set of exemplars for minimum expectations would help to better ensure both teacher understanding and the instrument's appropriate implementation.

Long Term Recommendations

1. **Develop and implement a long-term teacher training plan designed to ensure the SCRA's valid and reliable use within classrooms.** The validity and reliability of the South Carolina Readiness Assessment are dependent upon the instrument's *appropriate use by well-trained educators*. The state has provided little such training since the instrument's pilot period (2000-2002), and most notably since its 2002 revision and launch. For the Readiness Assessment to justify both its legislative intent and the considerable time commitment it requires of educators, the Department must develop high quality training plans designed to address the SCRA's considerable, potential worth as a formative assessment for use within the state's early childhood classrooms. Such training programs should include both inservice and pre-service educators.

2. **Develop, adopt, or adapt a developmentally appropriate formative reading assessment for use in first and second grades and modify SCRA to include additional literacy assessment for kindergarten.** The first and second grade assessments could become an extension of SCRA or could be a separate entity. The assessment system should provide opportunities for periodic formative assessment during the school year, reports that are useful for informing classroom instruction, strand-level information about individual students, and should be compatible with best practices in reading instruction and reading research. Like other assessments for young children, the reading assessment will also require appropriate and on-going professional development to support its appropriate use.

Recommendations Related to Cost of Testing Programs

1. **Eliminate the administration of grades one and two PACT English language arts and mathematics as off-level tests.** Both the EAA and NCLB require testing in grades three through eight and neither requires testing in grades one and two. To help ensure that students are appropriately challenged, students would be tested on grade level the first time they are exposed to PACT. IEP teams could, of course, recommend off-level testing in grades four through eight. The development of complete tests for a small population of users is cost ineffective. Projected cost savings is approximately one million dollars per year.

2. **Phase out the use of constructed response items on PACT**.
   a. 2004-2005 – Administer existing test

b. 2005-2006 – Replace constructed response items with sufficient numbers of new multiple choice items to retain reliability during this year. Each level in which reporting is expected must have 8 – 10 items as minimum coverage.
c. 2006-2007 – Administer PACT tests with sufficient new multiple choice items to achieve strand-level interpretive data. We could have additional items per strand without longer testing. While we respect the contribution of constructed response items, they are difficult and costly to develop and score (15 times more expensive than objective items). Multiple-choice items, properly constructed, can provide equal rigor of assessment, higher reliability, and quicker turnaround of results. In addition to financial advantages, this change would reduce testing and scoring turnaround time.
d. The total potential cost savings of this change has not been calculated, but would easily exceed $1,000,000 per year.

3. **Discontinue the development of new multiple choice tests every year in favor of developing new tests forms every other year or every third year.** This timing would allow a test to be chosen from a "bank" of three test forms (two given previously and one new form) and would prevent personnel from becoming overly familiar with test items. This procedure will provide sufficient test development to allow the test content to be refreshed and aligned as warranted. Once several unreleased versions are in hand, alternating new and previous versions would save about $530,000 every other year.

4. **Assuming constructed response questions are eliminated, discontinue the scanning of test booklets in favor of scanning answer sheets that are separate from the test booklets.** This procedure will dramatically reduce shipping and handling costs, reduce scanning costs, and speed up the return of test results. (Even third grade students can use an answer sheet if sufficient spacing is provided). Anticipated savings is over $1,000,000 per year.

5. **Add a scoring center in South Carolina as a specification in the state bidding process to reduce shipping costs, scoring turnaround time, and distribution time to school districts.**

6. **Aggregate net savings from state program modifications to a line-budget item such as that used for textbooks, other instructional materials, and diagnostic tests for the classroom.** The state could set criteria for the purchase of diagnostic testing tools that would respect the integrity and alignment of our standards-based system.

7. **Move the ELA extended response test to the early spring each year to reduce testing overload and scoring turnaround**. This change would allow the ELA results to be reported before the end of school along with the other test results.

8. **Eliminate the requirement that students take the Algebra I EOCT and the grade-level PACT in mathematics.** Explore other matrix possibilities such as exempting AP students from EOCT and HSAP.

9. **Conduct a controlled cost and program effectiveness study of on-line testing within our state program**. Also, ensure that each South Carolina district has the technology infrastructure to support this innovation.

10. Pending approval by the U.S. Department of Education and approval of 43-259, **use the Physical Science End of Course test to meet NCLB requirements for testing science in high schools.**

11. **Require passage of required courses in high school science and social studies in lieu of exit examinations in science and social studies.** The required courses would include U.S. History and Constitution and Physical Science for which there are end-of-course examinations. This recommendation would result in a savings of approximately $4 Million.

12. **Provide additional funding for teacher reliability training for the South Carolina Readiness Assessment program.**

Appendix A – Descriptions

Interpretation of Performance Level Descriptors for the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT)

The descriptors for each performance level include details about the knowledge and skills that students at the **cut score** for that performance level have demonstrated on the PACT from 1998-2003. The knowledge and skills listed for each performance level are not separated by standards or strands and are listed only for areas for which there was adequate evidence. For this reason and because standards that are tested may change from year to year to provide comprehensive coverage of the state curriculum standards, the skills presented in this document indicate some, but not all, of the knowledge and skills typically possessed by the student whose achievement is at the cut score at a particular level.

PACT Grade Three English Language Arts Performance Level Descriptors

	What students likely can do	What students likely cannot do
Below Basic	• draw simple conclusions about a high-interest passage • summarize the main idea when the text provides obvious support • use word matching strategies to locate details in passages • use context clues to determine the meaning of multi-meaning words	• discriminate among context clues to draw more sophisticated conclusions • reread text to locate details in longer, denser passages • read poetry • combine reading strategies in order to draw higher-level conclusions about the text they read

Descriptors describe skills students at cut-score points likely possess, but descriptors do not reflect the only skills necessary to score in an achievement level category.

PACT Grade Three English Language Arts Performance Level Descriptors

	What students likely can do in addition to the skills that Below Basic students can do	What students likely cannot do
Basic	• locate multiple, appropriate details in a passage • make simple inferences from a high-interest text • summarize the main idea • use context clues to determine synonyms • demonstrate fundamental research knowledge	• draw distinctions among details to make more complex inferences in informational, literary, and poetic text • use prior knowledge in addition to information from the text to draw conclusions. • differentiate between fact and opinion • identify different games • identify attributes of genres.

Descriptors describe skills students at cut-score points likely possess, but descriptors do not reflect the only skills necessary to score in an achievement level category.

PACT Grade Three English Language Arts Performance Level Descriptors

	What students likely can do in addition to the skills that Basic students can do	What students likely cannot do
Proficient	• draw distinctions among details to make more complex inferences in informational, literary, and poetic texts • use prior knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions • differentiate between fact and opinion • identify different genres • identify attributes of genres	• analyze groups of word to distinguish between complete sentences and phrases

Descriptors describe skills students at cut-score points likely possess, but descriptors do not reflect the only skills necessary to score in an achievement level category.

PACT Grade Three English Language Arts Performance Level Descriptors

	What students likely can do in addition to the skills that Proficient students can do
Advanced	• draw fine distinctions among many details to make inferences (e.g., cause and effect) regarding complex informational, literary, and poetic text • analyze and evaluate writing

Descriptors describe skills students at cut-score points likely possess, but descriptors do not reflect the only skills necessary to score in an achievement level category.

Appendix B – "Maps" of Tests